

Comments on Behavioral Outcomes of Deinstitutionalization

The SB627 Work Group materials for August 4, 2014, contained a Policy Research Brief from the University of Minnesota that reviewed the research papers from 1977 to 2010 addressing behavioral outcomes for deinstitutionalized people. This work represents considerable effort and a careful summary of the findings in the literature. Clearly, many people benefitted from moving to the community during the 1980s and 1990's as the nation transitioned from institutions as the only option to a more diversified and balanced approach. However, what relevance does this history paper have to the Work Group with respect to the factors being considered?

Old research. The most recent paper cited in the tables 1 thru 4 of the Policy Research Brief had a publication date of 2005, which must be well after the data were collected. The median publication date for the "contrast" studies was about 1987 and the median data for the "longitudinal studies" was about 1996. At those times, institutions had three times and two times respectively as many residents as they did in 2010, yet institutional populations continued to decline somewhat between 2010 and 2014.

Questionable relevance of results. The Policy Research Brief acknowledges that there was a serious yet unavoidable bias in the research papers being reviewed.

"Many of the skills/behaviors that make up the operational definitions of adaptive behavior are much more likely to be practiced in non-institutional settings (e.g., self-care and domestic skills, community living skills). It may seem biased to use such skills/behaviors as a component of a comparison of institutional and community settings, given the limited opportunities to learn and practice such skills in institutional settings."

Challenging behaviors are a major reason for individuals to need Training Center placements, and such behaviors were the outcomes that did not benefit from community placement.

What is needed. It is unfortunate that more recent studies have not been conducted to distinguish those behavioral outcomes that benefit from community settings from those that benefit from Training Center settings. But for the Work Group, the issue is more likely to be whether families have the choice to emphasize health and safety or are forced to have loved ones transitioned into less protective environments.